



DIOCESAN PRESS SERVICE

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EPISCOPAL CHURCH CENTER • 815 SECOND AVENUE • NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10017

Walter H. Boyd, Press Officer
M. Drew Dearnaley, Assistant Press Officer

Telephone: (212) 867-8400

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ROLE OF EDUCATORS AFFIRMED AT CONFERENCE

SAN ANTONIO, Texas -- "Life as we experience it is constantly breaking down at the center, and we are forever attempting to prop it up from the periphery," according to the keynote speaker at a national gathering of Christian educators of the Episcopal Church.

Bishop Richard B. Martin, Executive for Education for Ministry and Mission at the Episcopal Church Center in New York City, told 165 educators, meeting in San Antonio, Tex., Jan. 26-27, "Christian education is not an addenda or postscript in the Church's mission."

He pointed out that Jesus Christ is the center of the Church. "Christian education is learning to know Christ, and to follow him in obedient service.

"Christian education is specific and definite; it begins, continues and ends with the developing and nurturing of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and with our neighbors."

The national conference was designed "to explore and affirm the role of Christian educators as partners in the total ministry of the Church." The two-day meeting preceded a four-day Northamerican Event for Church Educators, sponsored by the ecumenical Joint Educational Development.

As background, Bishop Martin traced the beginning and development of the Seabury Series or Movement, a Christian education program for parishes and families, which was born at General Convention in the late 1940s.

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He said that there are a variety of appraisals of that movement. "Perhaps the most valuable legacy that the Seabury Movement has given to this Church," he continued, "is the grand vision and design of the place and purpose of Christian education in the Church. As Christian educators, we must keep that vision before the Church."

In Christian education, Bishop Martin said, "the dream and the dreamer must become one."

"The vision is both a goal and a journey. It is being and becoming. When the way and wayfarer become one, when the journey and the journeyer are one, a cosmic power is harnessed for divine purpose."

He continued, "Jesus had a vision of the Kingdom of God: complete trust in God and caring love for neighbor. Jesus was both the dreamer and the dream. He had a vision of the Kingdom of God and he offered himself as the way to become a citizen of that Kingdom."

Bishop Martin said that "there is more intentional Christian education going on today than at any time in the 36 years of my ministry."

"While I am in no way saying that we are satisfied with the state of Christian education across the Church, I am saying that we have cause to rejoice in the vastly improved situation of the Christian education posture today. Vital Christian education is taking place."

While not discounting all ecumenical curriculum material, Bishop Martin said Christian education material must bear "a stamp of home," of the Anglican tradition. "We must know that if we continue to embrace curriculum materials from every tradition under the heavens, we need not be surprised if we are producing all kinds of members under heaven, thus loosely committed members who have trouble identifying their faith tradition and historical background."

Verna Dozier of Washington, D. C., a free-lance education consultant, addressed the conference at its banquet on the theme, "Affirmations of the Christian Educator."

She said that if evangelism is the mouth of the Body of Christ (the Church), and social action is its heart, and mission its ears, and stewardship its head, then Christian education is its veins and sinews.

"Christian educators are the guardians of the Gospel Story," she said. "We hold the whole enterprise together. That's our work in the body." Without Christian educators -- the veins and sinews -- the body could not function. "We take the salvation story to all the body. Without Christian education, stewardship is confused and thinks it is the end, not the means."

She listed six characteristics of successful Christian education: the intimate involvement of the rector; a program for both sexes and all ages which is not synonymous with Sunday School and children's programs only; a curriculum that is broader than the bound Bible; a plan that embraces offices and homes and many other places; a program that is best when "participants participate" in discussion; and a process that is going on all the time.

On Sunday morning, panel addresses on the theme, "Speaking on Christian education from where I stand," were presented by a bishop (A. Donald Davies of Dallas), a volunteer parish educator (Nancy Axell of Oakland, Calif.), a professional educator (Armando Guerra of Guatemala), and a parish priest (Joseph Russell of Albany, Ore.). CDS P 168

Each of the speakers emphasized the centrality of Christian education in the total ministry of the Church. Bishop Davies said that "Christian education is the basic responsibility of a bishop -- but few do it." He commended the decentralization of the "national Christian education empire" and the increasing importance of the ministry of the laity as hopeful signs for the 1980s.

Mrs. Axell spoke of family camping weekends, Cursillo retreats, and special programs for singles, as well as more traditional learning experiences, as part of the parish program for this decade.

Father Guerra described the Christian education work and challenges in the Diocese of Guatemala. He singled out four special emphases for the 1980s: evangelism, spirituality, autonomy and the production of adequate educational materials.

He said that in his area -- where the Roman Catholic Church is the dominant religious body -- the Episcopal Church's Christian education program, with an emphasis on evangelism, shows that one "can be catholic without being Roman and evangelical without being Protestant."

Father Russell said that the Jewish priest dramatized the Torah while the rabbi or teacher "helped the people wrestle with God, with truth, with life."

"Jesus never answered a question. Why do we educators feel we have to answer questions? If we get people to ask questions, we are educating."

He said that he does not advocate having the Church school at the same time as the parish liturgy. To do that, he said, implies that "adults are not supposed to learn and children are not supposed to worship."

As a parish priest, he said, he has never felt more of a "shared ministry." He continued: "All are priests and pastors to each other. All are called to wrestle, to dramatize the faith story. When we have a common pastoral ministry to each other, Christ is served and shared."

Episcopalians from all nine provinces were present, from as far away as Hawaii, Guatemala and Panama. Several Christian educators -- including the staff officer -- represented the Anglican Church of Canada.

Suffragan Bishop Stanley Hauser of the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas welcomed the participants at the opening session. Following a Eucharist on Sunday afternoon, with Bishop Scott Field Bailey, diocesan of West Texas, as celebrant, a reception was held for the visitors at Cathedral House, the diocesan offices.

Following the denominational meetings, some 750 Christian educators, representing 13 denominations, spent four days at the Northamerican Event for Church Educators. The Event was a project of Joint Educational Development, which was initiated in 1970 by the staffs of six churches, including the Episcopal Church.

The Event was planned by church educators and national staffs of nine JED partners, with other denominations supporting the work of the planning team. The Rev. Douglas Cooke of the Diocese of Connecticut was coordinator of the Episcopal Church's involvement.

(NOTE TO DIOCESAN EDITOR: If there were educators from your diocese, you might include that information in a sentence such as: The Diocese of _____ was represented by _____.)

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PICTURE CAPTIONS

80036/1 The Rt. Rev. Richard B. Martin, left, keynote speaker at a national Episcopal Christian educators conference, Jan. 26-27, was welcomed to San Antonio, Texas, by Bishop Scott Field Bailey and Zethyl LeSturgeon, both of whom helped with local planning and arrangements. Bishop Martin, who is Executive for Education for Ministry and Mission at the Episcopal Church Center, addressed the 165 educators on the theme, "Towards a Holistic Approach to Education for Ministry and Mission." (Photo Credit: William Noble).

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80036/2 Verna Dozier of Washington, D.C., a free-lance consultant for education, told 165 Christian educators of the Episcopal Church at a national conference in San Antonio in late January, "Christian educators are the guardians of the Gospel Story. We hold the whole enterprise together." (Photo Credit: William Noble).

80036/3 A panel -- consisting of a bishop, a parish priest, a volunteer Christian educator, and a professional diocesan staff person -- addressed 165 Christian educators of the Episcopal Church on the theme, "Speaking on Christian Education, from where I stand -- looking into the 1980s," at a national conference in San Antonio, Jan. 26-27. At the microphone is Bishop A. Donald Davies of Dallas, with other panel members seated, l. to r., Nancy Axell of California, the Rev. Joseph Russell of Oregon, and the Rev. Armando Guerra of Guatemala. (Photo Credit: William Noble).

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